JOSEPH AND ZULEIKA

BY

JAMI

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joseph and zuleika

JAMI, THE LAST of the great classic poets of Persia, was born at Jam, near Herat, in 1414 and died in Herat in 1492. He essayed every form of literature and achieved success in each. From childhood he was welcomed everywhere as a marvel of brilliancy. He himself wrote that he never found a master who knew more than he. When we seek for the work which best represents this universal genius, we find it perhaps in his chief love-tale, which follows below. This mingles Nizami's romantic touch with Jalal's Sufism and the fire of Hafiz. It is Jami at his highest note.

Zuleika, the daughter of Taimus, King of Mauretania, beheld in a dream a figure of such extraordinary beauty that she became immediately enamored of the glorious vision, and sank into a deep melancholy, fruitlessly longing for the unknown object. This dream was three times repeated, and the last time the beautiful apparition named Egypt as the land of his abode. He is indeed Joseph, or Yusuf, of the Old Testament, and Zuleika is to play the part of Potiphar's wife. The following is abridged by L. M. Costello.

The ravens of the night were hushed,
The bird of dawn began his lay,
The rosebud, newly awakened, blushed
To feel the touch of springing day,
And bade the roses round unveil,
Roused by the warbling nightingale.
The jasmine stood all bathed in dew;
Wet were the violet's lids of blue.

Zuleika, fairer than the flowers,
Lay tranced—for 'twas not sleep that stole
Her senses, through the night's still hours,
And raised new visions to her soul.
The heart unfettered, free to rove,
Turned toward the idol of her love.

No—'twas not sleep, 'twas motionless,
Unbroken thought, repressed in vain;
The shadow of the day's distress,
A frenzy of remembered pain.
But, 'midst those pangs, what rapture still;
The same dear form is ever there;
Those eyes the rays of Eden fill
And odors of the blest distill

From every curl of that bright hair!
His smiles!—such smiles as houris wear
When from their caves of pearl they come,
And bid the true believer share
The pleasures of their sacred home.
See, on his shoulder shines a star
That glows and dazzles as he moves:
She feels its influence afar,
She gazes, worships, hopes—and loves!

At this period, while her mind is absorbed by the one engrossing idea, an embassy arrives in Mauritania from that very country, Egypt, the land of all her hopes, soliciting the hand of the princess for the Asis, or grand vizier of Pharaoh, an offer which she unhesitatingly accepts, being secretly convinced that her visionary lover and her proposed future husband are the same. She accordingly departs for Egypt, with a splendid and numerous retinue, and makes a magnificent entry into Memphis, under the escort of the Asis Potiphar, or Kitfir, himself, who comes to meet his bride. Curious to discover his identity, she anxiously seizes an opportunity of peeping through the curtains of her litter, but is filled with grief and dismay on finding a totally differ-

ent person from the lovely image of her dreams. She thus exclaims, on hearing the acclamations which announce the arrival of the Asis, when he first comes to meet her, before she has yet made the discovery fatal to her peace:

O joy too great!—O hour too blest!
He comes—they hail him—now, more near,
His eager courser's feet I hear.
Oh heart! be hushed within my breast,
Burst not with rapture! Can it be?
The idol of my life—divine,
All radiant, clothed in mystery,
And loving me as I adore,
As none dared ever love before,
Shall be—nay, is—even now, is mine!

I will be patient, but his breath
Seems stealing o'er my senses—death
Were better than suspense like this—
One draught—though 'twere the last—of bliss!
One glance, though in that glance I die,
To prove the glorious certainty!

Not he! not he! on whom for years
My soul has dwelt with sacred truth;
For whom my life has passed in tears,
And wasted was my bloom of youth;
For whom I breathed, and thought, and moved,
My own, my worshiped, my beloved!
I hailed the night, that I might gaze
Upon his star's unconquered blaze:
The morn but rose that I might pray,
Hope, wish, expect from day to day,
My sole existence was that thought,
And I do wake to know 'tis naught?
Vain tears, vain madness, vain endeavor,
Another blasts my sight forever !

Dawn upon the wide world broke,
And the sun's warm rays awoke;
Scattering o'er the cloudy sky
Hues of rich variety:
Such bright tinting as illumes
With its rays the peacock's plumes,
And the parrot's feathers bright,
Touches with a starry light.

The Asis rides in kingly guise;
Yon curtained litter holds the prize
More precious than all wealth beside—
His own, his young, his peerless bride.

Around, afar, of homage proud,
In countless ranks his warriors crowd,
Well may the lordly Asis boast
The glories of his gorgeous host.
Rich are the veils, profusely spread,
That canopy the "fair one's" head;
Like some delicious tree that throws
Its shade, inviting to repose:
And, like soft turf, the carpets lie,
Bedecked with gay embroidery.

The temple moves, all-glorious, on—
Throned in the midst the "happy one."
All heaven resounds with shout and song,
As the bright pageant sweeps along.
The camel-drivers' cries succeed,
Urging their stately beasts to speed.
Whose hoofs, with swift and frequent tread,
The sands with moonlike forms have spread:
The earth is plowed with coursers' feet

And still fresh hosts the wounds repeat.
Many a fair and blushing maid
Exulted in the gay parade:
And all who called the Asis lord
Hailed the fair idol he adored.
But she— "the beautiful," "the blest"—
What pangs, what tumults shook her breast!
She sat, concealed from every eye—
Alone—in hopeless misery.

"O Fate!" she cried; "O ruthless Fate!
Why am I made thy mark of hate?
Why must my heart thy victim be?
Thus lost, abandoned—crushed by thee!
Thou camest, in troubled dreams, and stole
The peace, the pleasure of my soul,
In visions that the blest might share,
Whose only fruit has been despair.
I see each glittering fabric fall;
But vain reproach, vain trust, vain all!
For help, for rest, where can I fly?
My heart is riven—let me die!

Have I then lingered long in pain,
In sad suspense, in musings vain,

To be—O crowning grief! betrayed,
In foreign lands a victim made?
Relentless destiny! accurst
Were all the joys thy visions nurst.
Is there no drop of hope left yet?
Must I all promises forget?
Dash not my cup to earth: say, Power benign,
I may be blest—even yet he may be mine!"

"Why hast thou thus cruelly
Robbed me of my peace?
What have I done to thee to be thus treated;
it is folly indeed that I seek help from thee.
When souls melt, thou art called upon for aid;
What is the melting of thy soul?"

Thus raved Zuleika, when without
Arose the sudden deafening shout
That hailed the close of all their toil—

"Lo!—Memphis! and the banks of Nile!"

Then, far and wide, the glittering ranks
Rush to the fiowery river's banks.
The Asis' sign his slaves obey,

Gold, silver, flowers, bestrew the way:
And o'er the litter gems are thrown,
Whose countless rays like meteors shone;
As thick they fall as on the rose
Hang the rich dews at evening's close;
The courser's feet on rubies trod,
O'er mounds of gold the camel strode.

On swept the train—one gorgeous mile,
Planting with gems the banks of Nile;
The proud stream rolled its waters deep
O'er pearls in many a shining heap:
Each shell was filled with pearls; each scale
That clothed the crocodile in mail
Was changed to silver, as he lay
And basked amidst the fervid ray.

And onward to the palace-gate
The train poured on, in sumptuous state;
The glowing portals opened wide—
In flowed the overwhelming tide,
Ushering the Asis and his bride.

A throne the Peris might have framed,
The sun and moon's pale luster shamed:

And she, whose radiance all effaced—
Zuleika—on the throne was placed.
Sparkling with jewels, red with gold,
Her heart shrunk, withered, crushed, and cold;

Although a feverish sense of pain
Frenzied her mind and seared her brain:
As on a flaming hearth she sat—
Amidst rejoicing—desolate!
Laden with many a priceless gem,
Crowned with a gorgeous diadem.
Each pearl a poisonous drop appears:
And from her eyes fall scalding tears.

And thus a crown is gained—for this,
We leave all thoughts of present bliss!
We toil, we strive, we live in care,
And in the end possess—despair!
Our sun of youth, of hope, is set,
And all our guerdon is—regret!

The poem now pursues the Scriptural account of the life of Joseph, or Yussuf, whose supernatural beauty is,

however, described as being the especial gift of God, and recorded to have been so great that no woman could look on him without love. Zuleika, therefore, only shared the fate of all her sex. Some writers say the ladies who clamored so much against her for her passion were, when he first entered the chamber where they were all assembled, in the act of cutting pomegranates, some say oranges, and in their admiration and amazement cut their fingers instead of the fruit! Yussuf is considered the emblem of divine perfection, and Zuleika's love is the image of the love of the creature toward the Creator: some go so far as to say that we ought to follow her example, and should permit the beauty of God to transport us out of ourselves. The rapid change from prison to high estate of Yussuf they consider a type of the impatience of the soul to burst its fetters and join its Creator.

Yussuf was always surrounded with a celestial light, typical as well of the moral beauty and wisdom which adorned his mind. He is sold as a slave, and Zuleika becomes his purchaser, to the great rage and envy of all her rivals, amongst whom was included the Princess

Nasigha, of the race of Aad. The beautiful Yussuf now enters her service, and, at his own desire, a flock of sheep are given to his special keeping, his admiring mistress wishing, by every indulgence, to attach him to her. The nurse of Zuleika is the confidante of the passion which she cannot control, and which, at length, in an imprudent moment, she discloses to its object himself. His father, Jacob, or the angel Gabriel in his likeness, appears, to warn him of his danger, and he flies, leaving his mistress in an agony of despair, rage, and grief. She thus exclaims:

Is this a dream?—another dream,
Like that which stole my senses first,
Which sparkled o'er my life's dull stream,
By idle, erring fancy nursed?
Was it for this my life I spent
In murmurs deep, and discontent—
Slighted, for this, all homage due,
From gen'rous, faithful love withdrew?
For this, no joy, no pomp have prized;
For this, all honors have despised—
Left all my soul, to passion free,
To be thus hated—spurned-by thee?
O God! to see thee loathing turn,

While on my cheeks swift blushes burn:
Contempt, abhorrence on thy brow,
Where radiant sweetness dwelt—>till now!
Thy bitter accents, fierce, severe,
In harsh, unwonted tones to hear:
Thy horror, thy disgust to view,
And know thy accusations true!
All, all but this I could have borne—
A husband's vengeance and his scorn;
To be reproached, disgraced, reviled,
So Yussuf on his victim smiled.
I would, amidst the desert's gloom,
Have hailed, with thee, a living tomb;
My home, my state, my birth forgot,
And, with thy love, embraced thy lot;
Had taught my heart all pangs to share,
And prove what perfect love can dare.

Let me look back to that dark hour
That bound my spirit to thy power—
Thy grateful words, thy glance recall,
My hopes, my love—and curse them all;
Let me thy tender looks retrace,
The glories of thy heavenly face;
Thy brow, where Aden's splendor lies,

And the mild luster of thine eyes:
Yet, let my heart no weakness prove,
But hate thee as I once could love.

What fearful eloquence was thine,
What awful anger—just—divine!
Shuddering, I saw my heart displayed.
And knew all this I should have said!
'Twas mine to shrink, withstand, in time,
For, while I sinned, I knew my crime.

O wretched, wavering heart!—as vain
Thy wild resentment as thy pain:
One thought alone expels the rest,
One sole regret distracts my breast,
O'ermastering and subduing all—
More than my crime, more than my fall:
Are not shame, fear, remorse, forgot,
In that one thought—he loves me not?

Though in a dark and narrow cell
The "fair beloved" confined may dwell,
No prison is that dismal place,
'Tis filled with dignity and grace:

And the damp vaults and gloom around
Are joyous spring, with roses crowned.

Not Paradise to me were fair
If he were not a dweller there;
Without his presence all is night,
My soul awakes but in his sight:
Though this frail tenement of clay
May here amidst its pomp remain,
My spirit wanders far away,
And dwells with his in prisoned pain.

In solitude, where Being signless dwelt,
And all the universe still dormant lay
Concealed in selflessness, One Being was
Exempt from "I" or "Thou"-ness, and apart
From all duality; Beauty Supreme,
Unmanifest, except unto Itself
By Its own light, yet fraught with power to charm
The souls of all; concealed in the Unseen,
An Essence pure, unstained by aught of ill.
No mirror to reflect Its loveliness,
Nor comb to touch Its locks; the morning breeze
Ne'er stirred Its tresses; no collyrium

Lent luster to Its eyes; no rosy cheeks
O'ershadowed by dark curls like hyacinth
Nor peach-like down were there; no dusky mole
Adorned Its face; no eye had yet beheld
Its image. To Itself it sang of Love
In wordless measures. By Itself it cast
The die of Love. But Beauty can not brook
Concealment and the veil, nor patient rest
Unseen and unadmired; 'twill burst all bonds,
And from Its prison-casement to the world
Reveal Itself. See where the tulip grows
In upland meadows, how in balmy spring
It decks itself; and how amidst its thorns
The wild rose rends its garment, and reveals
Its loveliness. Thou too, when some rare thought;
Or beauteous image, or deep mystery
Flashes across thy soul, canst not endure
To let it pass, but holdst it, that perchance
In speech or writing thou mayst send it forth
To charm the world. Whatever beauty dwells,
Such is its nature, and its heritage
From Everlasting Beauty, which emerged
From realms of purity to shine upon

The worlds, and all the souls which dwell therein.
One gleam fell from It on the universe
And on the angels, and this single ray
Dazzled the angels, till their senses whirled
Like the revolving sky. In diverse forms
Each mirror showed it forth, and everywhere
Its praise was chanted in new harmonies.
The cherubim, enraptured, sought for songs
Of praise. The spirits who explore the depths
Of boundless seas, wherein the heavens swim
Like some small boat, cried with one mighty voice,

"Praise to the Lord of all the universe!"

Behold those spheres forever circling, bound
With scarves of azure, in their mystic round.
See, their light mantles loosely floating throw
A flood of radiance on the world below.
See them pursuing through the night and day,
True to their purpose, their triumphant way.
Each, like a player's ball obedient, still
Is moved and guided by superior will.
One eastward from the west its journey bends,

The other's ship to western waves descends.
Each in due progress with alternate sway
Lights the still night or cheers the busy day.
One writes fair lines that promise golden joys:
One with sad aspect bonds of bliss destroys.
All, joying in their might, their task renew,
And with untiring haste their course pursue.
Onward forever to the goal they press
With feet and loins that know not weariness.
Who learns the secret of their dark intent?
Who knows on whom each wanderer's face is bent?

No heart is that which love ne'er wounded: they
Who know not lovers' pangs are soulless clay.
Turn from the world, O turn thy wandering feet;
Come to the world of Love and find it sweet.

Once to his master a disciple cried:
"To wisdom's pleasant path be thou my guide."
"East thou ne'er loved?" the master answered; "learn
The ways of love and then to me return."
Drink deep of earthly love, that so thy lip
May learn the wine of holier love to sip.
But let not form too long thy soul entrance:

Pass o'er the bridge; with rapid feet advance.
If thou wilt rest, thine ordered journey sped,
Forbear to linger at the bridge's head.

In this orchestra full of vain deceit
The drum of Being, each in turn, we beat.
Each morning brings new truth to light and fame,
And on the world falls luster from a name.
If in one constant course the ages rolled,
Full many a secret would remain untold.
If the sun's splendor never died away,
Ne'er would the market of the stars be gay.
If in our gardens endless frost were king,
No rose would blossom at the kiss of Spring

Her face was the garden of Iram, where
Roses of every hue are fair.
The dusky moles that enhanced the red
Were like Moorish boys playing in each rose-bed.
Of silver that paid no tithe, her chin
Had a well with the Water of Life therein.
If a sage in his thirst came near to drink,
He would feel the spray ere he reached the brink,
But lost were his soul if he nearer drew,

For it was a well and a whirlpool too.
Her neck was of ivory. Thither drawn,
Came with her tribute to beauty the fawn;
And the rose hung her head at the gleam of the skin
Of shoulders fairer than jasmine.
Her breasts were orbs of a light most pure,
Twin bubbles new-risen from fount Kafur,
Two young pomegranates grown on one spray,
Where bold hope never a finger might lay.
The touchstone itself was proved false when it tried
Her arms' fine silver thrice purified;
But the pearl-pure amulets fastened there
Were the hearts of the holy absorbed in prayer.

"I shall roll up the carpet of life when I see
Thy dear face again, and shall cease to be,
For self will be lost in that rapture, and all
The threads of my thought from my hand will fall;
Not me wilt thou find, for this self will have fled:
Thou wilt be my soul in mine own soul's stead.
All thought of self will be swept from my mind,
And thee, only thee, in my place shall I find;
More precious than heaven, than earth more dear,
Myself were forgotten if thou wert near."

"Mine eyes have been touched by the Truth's pure
ray,
And the dream of folly has passed away.
Mine eyes thou hast opened—God bless thee for it!—
And my heart to the Soul of the soul thou hast knit.
From a fond strange love thou hast turned my feet
The Lord of all creatures to know and meet;
If I bore a tongue in each single hair,
Each and all should thy praise declare."

"By the excellent bloom of that cheek which He gave,
By that beauty which makes the whole world thy
slave;
By the splendor that beams from that beautiful brow,
That bids the full moon to thy majesty bow;
By the graceful gait of that cypress, by
The delicate bow that is bent o'er thine eye;
By that arch of the temple devoted to prayer,
By each fine-woven mesh of the coils of thy hair;
By that charming narcissus, that form arrayed
In the sheen and glory of silk brocade;
By that secret thou callest a mouth, by the hair
Thou callest the waist of that body most fair;
By the musky spots on thy cheek's pure rose,

By the smile of thy lips when those buds unclose;
By my longing tears, by the sigh and groan
That rend my heart as I pine alone;
By thine absence, a mountain too heavy to bear,
By my thousand fetters of grief and care;
By the sovereign sway of my passion,
By thy carelessness whether I live or die;
Pity me, pity my lovelorn grief:
Loosen my fetters and grant relief:
An age has scorched me since over my soul
The soft sweet air of thy garden stole.
Be the balm of my wounds for a little; shed
Sweet scent on the heart where the flowers are dead.
I hunger for thee till my whole frame is weak:
O give me the food for my soul which I seek."

In his stalls had Yussuf a fairy steed,
A courser through space of no earthly breed;
Swift as the heavens, and black and white
With a thousand patches of day and night;
Now a jetty spot, now a starry blaze,
Like Time with succession of nights and days.
With his tail the heavenly Virgo's hair,
With his hoof the moon was afraid to compare.

Each foot with a golden new moon was shod,
And the stars of its nails struck the earth as he trod.
When his hoof smote sharp on the rugged flint
A planet flashed forth from the new moon's dint;
And a new moon rose in the sky when a shoe
From the galloping foot of the courser flew.
Like an arrow shot through its side in the chase,
He outstripped the game in the deadly race.
At a single bound he would spring, unpressed,
With the lightning's speed from the east to the west.

"O thou who hast broken mine honor's urn,
Thou stone of offense wheresoever I turn,
I should smite—for thy falsehood has ruined my
rest—
with the stone thou art made of, the heart in my
breast.

The way of misfortune too surely I trod
When I bowed down before thee and made thee my
god;
When I looked up to thee with wet eyes in my woe,
I renounced all the bliss which both worlds can
bestow.

From thy stony dominion my soul will I free,
And thus shatter the gem of thy power and thee."

With a hard flint stone like the Friend, as she spoke,
In a thousand pieces the image she broke.
Riven and shattered the idol fell,
And with her from that moment shall all be well.
She made her ablution, 'mid penitent sighs,
With the blood of her heart and the tears of her eyes.
She bent down her head to the dust; with a moan
She made supplication to God's pure throne:

"O God, who lovest the humble,
Thou To whom idols, their makers, their servants
bow;
'Tis to the light which Thy splendor lends
To the idol's face that its worshiper bends.
Thy love the heart of the sculptor stirs,
And the idol is graven for worshipers.
They bow them down to the image, and think
That they worship Thee as before it they sink.
To myself, O Lord, I have done this wrong,
If mine eyes to an idol have turned so long.
Thou hast washed the dark stain of my sin away;
Now restore the lost blessing for which I pray.

May I feel my heart free from the brand of its woes,
And cull from the garden of Yussuf a rose."

"Where is thy youth, and thy beauty, and pride?"
"Gone, since I parted from thee!" she replied.
"Where is the light of thine eye?" said he,
"Drowned in blood-tears for the loss of thee."
"Why is that cypress-tree bowed and bent?"
"By absence from thee and my long lament."
"Where is thy pearl, and thy silver and gold,
And the diadem bright on thy head of old?"

"She who spoke of my loved one," she answered, "shed,
In the praise of thy beauty, rare pearls on my head.
In return for those jewels, a recompense meet,
I scattered my jewels and gold at her feet.
A crown of pure gold on her forehead I set,
And the dust that she trod was my coronet.
The stream of my treasure of gold ran dry;
My heart is Love's storehouse, and I am I."

"Not love thee!—ah! how much I loved
Long absent years of grief have proved.
Severe rebuke, assumed disdain,

Dwelt in my words and looks in vain:
I would not passion's victim be,
And turned from sin—but not from thee.
My love was pure, no plant of earth
From my rapt being sprung to birth:
I loved as angels might adore,
And sought, and wished, and hoped no more.
Virtue was my belov'd: and thou
Hadst virtue's impress on thy brow.
Thy weakness showed how frail is all
That erring mortals goodness call.
I thanked thee, and reproached thee not
For all the sufferings of my lot.
The God we worship was thy friend,
And led me to my destined end,
Taught the great lesson to thy heart
That vice and bliss are wide apart:
And joined us now, that we may prove
With perfect virtue, perfect love.

The beauty returned which was ruined and dead,
And her cheek gained the splendor which long had
fled.

Again shone the waters which sad years had dried,
And the rose-bed of youth bloomed again in its pride.
The musk was restored and the camphor withdrawn,
And the black night followed the gray of the dawn.
The cypress rose stately and tall as of old:
The pure silver was free from all wrinkle and fold.
From each musky tress fled the traces of white:
To the black narcissus came beauty and light.

"The one sole wish of my heart," she replied,
"Is still to be near thee, to sit by thy side;
To have thee by day in my happy sight,
And to lay my cheek on thy foot at night;
To lie in the shade of the cypress and sip
The sugar that lies on thy ruby lip;
To my wounded heart this soft balm to lay;
For naught beyond this can I wish or pray.
The streams of thy love will new life bestow
On the dry thirsty field where its sweet waters flow."

Thus spoke the Angel: "To thee, O King,
From the Lord Almighty a message I bring:
Mine eyes have seen her in humble mood;

I heard her prayer when to thee she sued.
At the sight of her labors, her prayers, and sighs,
The waves of the sea of my pity rise.
Her soul from the sword of despair I free,
And here from My throne I betroth her to thee."